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Trial challenge inspection at a military facility

Issues related to verification of compliance with the provisions of the chemical weapons convention by the States parties to it are under active discussion in the Conference on Disarmament's Ad hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons.

In 1988 and 1989 national trial inspections to test procedures for verification of the non-production of chemical weapons in civil industry were conducted in a number of the States which are involved in the negotiations, and reports on those inspections were submitted to the Conference on Disarmament.

The results of such inspections facilitate more detailed work on systematic monitoring of facilities to be declared under article VI of the draft convention and its annexes, and the securing of agreement thereon.

The Soviet Union also views the holding of national trial inspections as a form of practical preparation on the part of States for their role as parties to the future chemical weapons convention.

With a view to the finalization and acceptance of procedures for conducting challenge inspections under article IX of the draft convention, it was considered useful to conduct national trial inspections at facilities which may be subject to such forms of verification subsequently, when the convention has entered into force.

Information on a trial challenge inspection conducted in the USSR is furnished below.

When selecting a facility for the holding of the trial inspection, the Soviet side bore in mind that under the future convention a challenge inspection may be conducted at any site or facility in a State party, with the challenged State having no right of refusal.

It is felt that the most typical grounds for challenge may be doubt on the part of States parties to the convention based on the suspected covert storage or production of chemical weapons by another State party.

Against this background, the facility selected for the trial inspection was an ordnance depot, at which chemical weapons are not and have never been stored.

The purpose of the inspection was to determine whether or not chemical weapons were present at the military depot.

Description of the facility:

Area - about 3 sq. km.

Perimeter - about 7 km.

Number of buildings and structures - about 100.

Storage capacity - more than 1,000 railway wagons.

Nature of terrain - rugged, wooded.

The trial inspection was conducted between 15 and 20 May 1989. The size of the inspection team, including observers, was 20 persons. They included armaments experts, specialists in CW detection and experts from the Soviet delegation to the Conference on Disarmament. The team owed its relatively large size to the fact that it dealt itself with all the organizational problems connected with the preparations for and the conduct of the inspection.

Programme of the trial inspection

As this was a national exercise, and since it was a first attempt at conducting a challenge inspection, the facility management was notified in advance of the objectives of the inspection team and the timing of its visit.

However, no actions were accomplished at the facility in direct reaction to the team's visit.

On the inspection team's arrival at the facility, the management held a meeting with the team members. The meeting lasted one hour.

During the meeting the leader of the inspection team informed the facility management of the purposes of the team's visit and its tasks.

The facility director informed the inspection team of the basic features of the facility, described its layout and indicated what in his view were the most sensitive areas which, he felt, could have no connection with storage of chemical weapons.

The leader of the inspection team requested the facility director to arrange for the team members to have unimpeded access to all points within the facility site, to inspect means of transport entering and leaving the facility and to take samples at places indicated by the inspectors.

The members of the inspection team were given 15 minutes' instruction in accident prevention at the facility. The members of the inspection team signed a register indicating that they had received such instruction.

By decision of the leader of the inspection team, it was divided into the following subgroups:

A subgroup to study documentation. Task: to verify the presence or absence of CW-related correspondence;

A subgroup to inspect the facility buildings and structures. Task: to visit storage areas and investigate the presence or absence of chemical weapons;

A subgroup to monitor means of transport entering and leaving the grounds of the facility. Task: to inspect means of transport and observe the facility perimeter;

A subgroup to work with the facility staff. Task: to interview facility staff on issues directly connected with the aims of the inspection.

A representative of the facility management attached to each subgroup accompanied the inspectors and assisted in the performance of their duties.

During the inspection the inspection team did not address direct instructions to the facility staff or request them to perform operations or actions they considered necessary for the conduct of the inspection. All such requests were addressed to the representatives of the facility management accompanying the inspection team.

During the inspection the inspection team endeavoured to refrain from gathering and keeping information unrelated to chemical weapons. Nevertheless, a large amount of such information concerning the dump came to the notice of the inspectors.

The inspection team visited and examined at close hand 10 per cent of the installations located within the depot. All the types of buildings and structures on the site were visited on a selective basis at the discretion of the inspection team.

The places visited by the inspectors were identified on the basis of indirect factors which, in the opinion of the inspection team, might indicate the presence of chemical weapons. These included the presence of air purification sytems in storage areas; the presence of protective gear and decontamination equipment in or immediately next to storage areas; the presence of specially protected sectors on the facility site, equipped with indication and warning systems; the absence of data on the operations of individual storage areas or other subdivisions of the facility within the overall system of documentation, or separate correspondence for individual subdivisions of the facility; the presence of storage areas from which items had been removed immediately prior to the arrival of the inspection team, according to information obtained from examination of the documentation and interviews with the facility staff.

The inspection team began its verification work with the least intrusive verification methods. However, as the facility management did not propose alternative measures which the inspection team found sufficiently persuasive and which would have made it unnecessary to visit the most sensitive areas of the facility, the team was obliged to acquaint itself with a specially circumscribed sector on the facility site. Moreover, the record-keeping methods used in the facility made it impossible to draw a clear line between information which the inspectors would have been justified in studying in view of the purposes of the inspection, and information which could have no connection whatsoever with chemical weapons.

On visits to the storage areas the inspectors visually examined specimens of the armaments and munitions kept there, compared the markings on the containers and on the specimens in them, verified their compliance and examined the external appearance of the stored munitions. Air samples were taken in the storage areas by the facility management at the request of the inspectors and in their presence.

Radio links were used for communications between the subgroups and the leader of the inspection team. For this purpose the facility management allocated one radio set for each subgroup and one for the leader of the inspection team.

During the inspection the inspection team interviewed the facility staff in the presence of the representative of the facility management who was accompanying them. In the course of the interviews the representative of the management rejected those questions which in his opinion went beyond the purposes of the inspection or the duties of the inspectors. In cases where the inspectors considered that a rejected question was indeed relevant to the conduct of the inspection, the situation was resolved between the leader of the inspection team and the facility director.

As a result of the trial inspection the inspection team established that there were no chemical weapons at the inspected facility. It should be pointed out, however, that such an unequivocal result was possible because the members of the inspection team who participated in the national inspection were conversant with the designations of types of Soviet chemical weapons, so that it was possible to dispense with the need to open the munitions in order to determine the type of charge used.

The inspection team considers that two factors should be borne in mind when conducting a challenge inspection at a military facility in order to clarify situations involving the suspected covert storage of chemical weapons.

First, a search should be made for specimens of chemical weapons on which information has been supplied in the declarations made by States parties within 30 days after the convention enters into force. In this way the task of the inspection team will be substantially simplified, since the main thrust of the inspection will be reduced to determining the presence or absence of specimens whose basic parameters are known.

Second, a search for undeclared specimens of chemical weapons may be conducted. In this case the task of the inspection team may be put differently: it will be to verify the presence or absence of undeclared forms or types of chemical weapons.

To perform the second task it is necessary to open specimens of munitions, devices and containers in order to verify the absence of a charge characteristic of a chemical weapon - or, to lessen the degree of intrusiveness in verification, to develop methods and techniques of verification not using contact methods whereby it can be determined unambiguously, without opening the casing, that a given specimen is not a chemical weapon.

The results of the inspection also demonstrate that the international inspectorate must undertake to safeguard confidential information which becomes known to the inspectors in the course of their duties in applying the convention and which is not connected with chemical weapons.

In order to reduce the level of disclosure of sensitive information which is not CW-related, the management of a facility being inspected must be able, during the inspection, to propose alternative measures as a substitute for access by the inspectors to particularly confidential information. However, the test of acceptability of such alternative measures must in every case be that they are satisfactory to the inspection team.

The results of the inspection demonstrate that where no breaches are identified during the verification process, the inspection report should contain a minimum of information and should not reveal the nature of the activities conducted in the facility.

In the view of the inspection team, inspections to clarify situations involving the suspected covert storage of chemical weapons are likely to be among the most complicated and labour-intensive types of challenge inspection.

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